

**GENERATIONS:  
CONNECTING ACROSS TIME AND PLACE**

**LARGE PRINT TEXT**



## **GENERATIONS: CONNECTING ACROSS TIME AND PLACE**

What is our relationship to past and future generations?

Baby boomers, millennials, first and second generation immigrants. We are obsessed with what makes one group different from the last. But the connections we make with other generations are often just as important as those we make with our own.

The artists in this exhibition were born in different decades and are represented by works created from the 1980s to the present day. While often personal in nature, each work addresses universal themes which resonate across time. Some artists explore the stories, memories and genes we inherit from our families. Others interrogate the contemporary legacies of historical figures and events.

This room introduces the main themes of the exhibition. The artists look to personal icons, family relationships, and everyday experiences. They question how personal and political pasts can bring us together – or pull us apart.

*GENERATIONS* is curated by an international group of students from the MA *Curating the Art Museum* programme at The Courtauld Institute of Art. The exhibition is part of the Somerset House summer programme which examines identity, perception and representation in modern Britain. It features works by British and UK-based artists, drawn from the Arts Council Collection.

**Mona Hatoum** 1952

Born in Lebanon, works in UK

***Measures of Distance, 1988***

Colour video with sound

Running time: 16 minutes

When the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) began, Hatoum was visiting London and was unable to return home. In this video, Hatoum overlays letters she received from her mother in Beirut on photographs of her mother showering. The artist reads the Arabic letters aloud in English. At the same time, we hear a conversation between the artist and her mother in Arabic, recorded on a trip to Beirut in 1981. Hatoum reveals an intimate portrait of their relationship, while reflecting on issues of exile, displacement and “a tremendous sense of loss as a result of the separation caused by war.”

Courtesy of Mona Hatoum and LUX, London.

**Alejandra Carles-Tolra** 1988

Born in Spain, works in UK

***Untitled* from the series *Where We Belong*, 2017**

Studio lustre C-type photograph

For the series *Where We Belong*, Carles-Tolra photographed members of the Jane Austen Pineapple Appreciation Society. Inspired by the British author Jane Austen (1775–1817) and the strong female characters she created, the group dresses up in period costume to attend dances, play games and socialise. In this photograph, Carles-Tolra captures a joyful sense of freedom as a ‘Janeite’ runs down a modern suburban street. The artist raises questions about how we can place ourselves between past and present, fantasy and reality.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **Appau Jnr Boakye-Yiadom 1984**

Born and works in UK

### ***Plantain Drop, 2014***

C-type print, HD video, brass

Running time: 1 minute 37 seconds

Boakye-Yiadom took this photograph of plantains growing in his mother's garden in Ghana. The video below was filmed in the artist's studio. For the artist, a plantain is an everyday object which takes on many cultural references. Depending on the references we are familiar with, we might see the banana skin of slapstick comedy, or think of the family meals we had growing up. These possible associations are often linked to different places and generations, and can change over time. While people may want particular aspects of culture to remain rooted, for Boakye-Yiadom "nothing really works that way: culturally, things are always intersecting."

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **Hurvin Anderson 1965**

Born and works in UK

### ***Is it okay to be black?, 2015–2016***

Oil on canvas

Anderson places us inside a barbershop, a space often featured in his work. Born to Jamaican parents, he depicts the Black barbershop as a place that represents his shared cultural belonging between the UK and the Caribbean. Old posters of Black icons and political activists are often found in these interiors. Identifiable here are Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), Malcolm X (1925-1965) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968). When discussing the work, Anderson asked: “What does it mean that we are still looking to these figures in this day and age?” The provocative title of the painting questions how much has really changed since these posters were first displayed decades ago.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

A 70th Anniversary Commission for the Arts Council Collection with New Art Exchange, Nottingham and Thomas Dane Gallery, London.

## **FAMILY TIES**

From 1836 to 1970, Somerset House served as the General Register Office, recording millions of births, marriages and deaths. It was a space where family ties were established, celebrated and mourned.

The artists in this room present more personal ways of documenting the joy and complexity of family relationships. They are recorded through conventional means such as photographs, as well as materials including wool, rose petals, skin and hair. The artists reveal the challenges of connecting to family as a result of generational differences. But they also illustrate a desire to strengthen our family ties, despite separation by distance or death. The works encourage us to reflect upon the feelings of

closeness and distance we can have with our own siblings, mothers, fathers and grandparents.

What drives us to document our family memories?  
What do we choose to record and what is left out?

**Donald Rodney** 1961–1998

Born and worked in UK

***In the House of My Father, 1997***

Photographic print on aluminium

Photograph taken by Andra Nelki

In the artist's hand rests a tiny sculpture of a house made from pieces of his own skin. These were removed during treatment for sickle cell anaemia, an inherited disease passed down to Rodney from his father. For art historian Eddie Chambers (born 1960), the fragility of the house suggests the impossibility of living in “a structure hopelessly unable to sustain itself”. In his work, Rodney increasingly used his experience of the disease as a metaphor for wider social and

political ills. This work has an added poignancy as it was made a year before the artist's death.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **Kathy Prendergast 1958**

Born in Ireland, works in UK

### ***The End and the Beginning, 1996***

Human hair and wood

*The End and the Beginning* is made out of the artist's hair woven together with that of her mother and that of her son. Winding the hair around a spool traditionally used for thread, Prendergast binds together three generations. She recalls her mother "always knitting, sewing or crocheting, always making something." These crafts were traditionally practised by women and passed down from mother to daughter. By incorporating her son's hair, Prendergast

questions traditional social conventions and domestic roles.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

**Susan Hiller** 1940–2019

Born in USA, worked in UK

***Sentimental Representations: In Memory of my Grandmothers (Part I – for Rose Ehrich), 1980***

Petals, acrylic, ink and photocopies on board

*Sentimental Representations* is a collage of rose petals dedicated to Hiller's grandmothers, both of whom were called Rose. The petals symbolise the women she loved and lost. Hiller trained as an anthropologist before becoming an artist. Here, she explores the subject of death and mourning in a way that is both personal and objective. In the typewritten text, she adopts a stark tone to express the loss of a

loved one: “Note: absence of the mother = death.”

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

**Joanna Piotrowska** 1985

Born in Poland, works in UK

***XV / FROWST, 2014***

***I / FROWST, 2014***

***III / FROWST, 2014***

Silver gelatin hand print photographs

*FROWST* is a series of staged family photographs. While the figures in each image are physically close, they appear emotionally distant. This distance is reflected in the title of the series, a rarely used English word that refers to a place that is both cosy and claustrophobic. Piotrowska incorporates poses from Family Constellations, a

therapeutic method developed by German psychotherapist Bert Hellinger (born 1925). The method attempts to heal trauma passed down through families. An alternative family photo album, *FROWST* reveals tensions that might otherwise remain undocumented.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **Hardeep Pandhal 1985**

Born and works in UK

### ***Baba Deep Thing by Mum, 2014***

Synthetic wool

*Baba Deep Thing by Mum* refers to the story of the 18th-century Sikh martyr Baba Deep Singh (1682–1757). According to some accounts of Singh's life, he continued to fight against Afghan soldiers even after being beheaded. This story was passed down to Pandhal by his mother. While his mother speaks little English, Pandhal speaks little Punjabi. By embroidering a garment made

by his mother, Pandhal explores a way to connect with her, and her cultural heritage, without using words.

**Please do not touch the work.**

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **SPEAKING TO HISTORY**

The artists in this room address the violent legacies of the British Empire, the transatlantic slave trade and racial discrimination. The trauma from such events can be passed down from one generation to the next. Over time, artists have returned to these histories to explore new ways of dealing with them.

Our understanding of the past is determined by who is narrating it, and how. These histories are often told by voices of authority – mostly by individuals who have not experienced their negative effects. As a result, certain points of view are privileged over others. Through imagined conversations and politically charged materials, the works here present new ways and alternative voices to narrate the past. In doing so, the artists highlight the personal, human nature of these events.

How will future generations tell these stories? And who has the right to tell them?

**Lubaina Himid 1954**

Born in Tanzania, works in UK

***Cotton.com, 2002***

84 oil on canvas panels, brass strip

*Cotton.com* is inspired by an act of solidarity. In 1862, Manchester mill workers chose to support the abolition of slavery in the United States.

Despite economic hardship, they refused to touch

cotton harvested by enslaved plantation workers from across the Atlantic. Here, Himid imagines a conversation between these two groups through pattern. In the brass panel, she takes a quote from a plantation inspector and reimagines it from the perspective of an enslaved woman. By giving her a voice, the artist creates a connection between the woman and the person reading the quote in the present.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

**Lucy Skaer** 1975

Born and works in UK

***The Tyrant, 2006***

Oak table with inlaid mother of pearl

During the time of the British Empire, desirable materials were imported from overseas colonies to the UK. This work combines two such materials,

which over time have come to be associated with British antique furniture. The artist has inlaid Pacific mother of pearl, in the shape of hands, into a nineteenth-century table made from tropical hardwood. The threatening gesture of the hands, reaching across the table, evokes what Skaer describes as “the tyrannical stages of early colonialism”. The work makes us question our knowledge of the everyday objects and colonial histories that are part of British identity today.

The original title of this work, *Leonora (The Tyrant)*, has been amended for the purpose of this show, at the suggestion of the artist.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

## **Helen Cammock 1970**

Born and works in UK

### ***There's a Hole in the Sky Part II: Listening to James Baldwin, 2016***

HD Video

Running time: 11 minutes

Set in the London Docklands, the work stages an

imaginary conversation between Cammock and American novelist James Baldwin (1924–1987). Cammock quotes passages from Baldwin’s writing that address African-American experiences of racial discrimination. She uses this conversation to explore longing and loss in relation to forced and voluntary migration of African-Americans to Europe. For the artist, this work is about lament, a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. While many still feel an emotional response to these events, Cammock considers lament to be “often ignored or undermined as part of world histories”.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.